and back to you

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Summary

All eyes are on Seattle Grace like never before. All eyes are on Derek Shepherd like never before.

All eyes are on Seattle Grace hospital like never before.

Last month, they were ranked number eight, and it's a widely held theory that maybe after all of this is over they'll be in the top five again. The top three is thought, with crossed fingers, but not spoken.

The news crews flutter in and out, and for three days you can't go a news cycle without seeing a shot of the hospital in all of it's sunny midday glory front and center on the screen while some reporter stumbles over medical terms and names of procedures that can't exactly be dumbed down to the usual sixth grade level. No one bothers to point out that it's only stopped raining in snatches, dating their profile shot of the hospital, or that the patient had been misdiagnosed and turned away three times from various hospitals across the country, one of them in that top five, or that not one of those reporters has any idea what the hell it is that they're attempting to describe.

Mark shrugs in the general direction of the redhead from Channel 7, who takes time away from her busy schedule of arguing with her cameraman and someone's assistant to send a smile his way, and then ducks his head as the wind picks up just a little sending rain droplets towards his face. Lexie picks up the pace, already ten steps ahead of him, and she's through the doors before he's even halfway there, her coffee cup safely ensconced in her hand. It was a product of their early evening coffee run down the street, because part of the budget cuts had cost them the ability to find a decent cup of coffee in the entire building, and while she can deal with that crap, he sure as hell can't.

There are two cups in his hand, warming them against the late November chill that has definitely set in. He has to keep a steady pace, nothing at all like Lexie's near-jog that she used to clear the space between the car and the entrance, to keep coffee from sloshing and spilling through the little rectangular holes and all over him, and when the doors finally close behind him she's chattering something to an intern he doesn't know the name of, and he presses on towards the elevators.

Visiting hours in the ICU are nearing their end, so it's even quieter than normal, machines and quiet words exchanged between doctors and nurses peppering the air. Derek's in the same place that he was when Mark left, which is also the same place where he's been on and off since last night. This isn't surprising.

"Any change?" Mark asks, handing Derek the second cup of coffee, which he wordlessly accepts. His eyes are tired and his shoulders are stiff, and Mark lays a heavy hand on one of them for a moment, a sign of companionship.

"No," Derek tells him, his eyes steady on the girl in the hospital bed, hooked up to monitors and IVs right and left. "She should wake up by tomorrow. We don't have to start worrying until tomorrow."

"The vultures are waiting outside, in the meantime," Mark lets him know, like he doesn't already.

The other man nods. "I talked to them this afternoon; should make the eleven o'clock." He crosses one leg over the other at the ankle and leans back against his chair. "I'll let them know either way in the morning."

"She'll be fine," Mark replies, because whether he believes it or not it's really the only thing to say in this situation. If it doesn't work out, if she doesn't pull through, then it's a step backward, for the neuro program and for Derek, not to mention they have a woman here who might not wake up. No one ever entertained that notion, though, not until it's been two days since the surgery and Derek's saying that after three they should be concerned. It's too close, and no one wants to be the one to say anything. They just want him to be right and for this to be over.

All eyes are on Derek Shepherd like never before.

Sometime around one in the morning, after yet another coffee run born out of restlessness, Mark takes it upon himself to coax Derek out of the patient's room.

"You know, this is what the night shift nurse's do," Mark says, listening to the clock tick another minute by, watching Derek closely. "Check vitals and IV's, make sure everything's functioning, page the doctor if they need to."

There's a ghost of a mildly amused smile that graces Derek's face as he looks up at Mark. "I've been a doctor just as long as you, you know. Telling me things I already know isn't going to work."

"Figured it was worth a try," Mark says, folding his hands, interlocked fingers, letting them sit on the top of the headrest, leaning against the back of an empty chair. "Except, see, I'm the kind of doctor who actually goes home and gets some sleep and actually lets the nurse's do their job and page me."

"Then go home," Derek replies, simply, dismissively, and returns his eyes back to his patient.

"You first."

At that, Derek switches topics. "Where's Lexie?"

"She said something about paperwork earlier." And while they're trading stories, he asks, "Where's Meredith?"

"Joe's probably," Derek replies, a guess that's more than likely true.

Mark nods, contemplates for a moment, and then crosses the room, wrapping his hands around Derek's arms and pulling, an attempt at physically hauling him out of here. Derek gives him a look, like he's being ridiculous, but stands, partly of his own will. "There's an on-call room bed with your name on it. Go find it."

It's a stand off in the making, their eyes locked once again, and Mark moves around him, effectively switching their places and settling himself in the chair the other man previously occupied. "What are you doing?"

"Watching her," he says, and his eyes let Derek know that any form of protest from here on out will fall on deaf ears. "I'll let you know if anything happens. Now go."

And Derek does.

He's back by six.

Dawn hasn't broken yet and Mark's occupying himself with his own paperwork, with some medical textbook that was out on the nurse's station, and now with an attempt at sifting through his backlog of voicemail, two days old because in all of this killing of time that he's been enduring the past two nights he'd managed to put that particular menial task off.

Derek hands him coffee, and Mark accepts it wordlessly, role reversal. The coffee shop is certainly making money off of them now.

"Did you sleep at all?" Mark asks, after a beat. Derek gives him a murmured 'no' that he already expected. In return, he says, "You look like crap."

"Yeah, and when was the last time you showered?" Derek shoots right back. It's when Mark notices that Derek's hair looks faintly damp. It fills in some of the last four hours for him.

"But I'm not the one who's going to be carried live by four local news networks in three hours."

Maybe he shouldn't have said it because Derek's face takes a turn for the serious and Mark feels more than a little regretful pretty much instantaneously. It's a reminder he didn't need, and he sinks into the chair across the room, prepared to sit vigil and cross his fingers and hope for the best, in lieu of anything else to do.

"Sorry," Mark says, but, really, it's too late for that.

At seven, Mark drives home.

The redhead from 7 is on his heels when he's walking to the car, absent a microphone and a camera. It does nothing to put him at ease.

"Has she woken up yet?"

He turns before he's at his car, stopping in the middle of the parking lot. "Dr. Shepherd will fill you in at nine."

"So that's a no?" She asks, because that's her job, ask questions, get answers, and Mark understands that sometimes just doing your job can piss other people off, but this woman is quickly searching out his last overtired nerve to grind her heel into.

"No, that's an 'I'm not involved in this case so I don't have an answer to give you'." He replies, shoving his hands in the pockets of his coat. It's worse outside than it was last night; the rain has slowed to a steady drizzle. "You interrogating our patients too?"

"No," she gives him what might be trying for a flirty smile. "Just the people with their hospital badges still clipped to their jeans."

Mark hadn't even noticed. He hadn't worn his scrubs since the early evening coffee run yesterday, and kept his badge on his street clothes for convenience. When he came back, which would be in half an hour if he timed everything right, he'd have to change back into his scrubs, check on his patients, and actually do his job. "Very observant," he tells her.

"That's what they pay me for."

"You sure it's not your sparkling personality and ability to read a script?" He retorts. Under normal circumstances, he'd flirt right back with her ��" it would probably make his life that much easier. But he's both tired and taken, not to mention slowly getting his clothes soaked through again the longer he stands out there. So he tells her, "If you were looking for an in, this isn't your day," and gets in his car.

His pager goes off mid-conversation with Yang, on his service and displaying only mild interest in the case. It leads him to an on-call room on the third floor and Derek, who looked like he was in the midst of a staring contest with himself in the mirror.

"You okay?" Mark asks, gesturing with his pager and a pair of raised eyebrows that Derek can see reflected in the mirror, even if he isn't facing him.

"I tell them there's no change, right?" Derek starts, ignoring Mark's question. He doesn't mind all that much; the answer was always going to be no. "There's no change but it's still early and we're very hopeful that this surgery was successful."

Mark shrugs. "Sure, just rattle off a bunch of medical jargon in between there, flash that smile that has most of the female population of this hospital calling you McDreamy, and you'll do fine. Works for women in bars; what's to say it won't work here?" Derek narrows his eyes in his general direction. "I'm joking about that last part."

"No," Derek shakes his head, running a hand through his hair, "you're not."

"I'm not," he confirms. "You just can't let on that you're nervous or they'll never stop asking questions. They'll know something's up."

"Were you a politician in another life?"

"Just a manwhore apparently."

It drags a smile out of Derek and that makes it more than worth it. His hands fall on Derek's shoulders again, when he turns to finally face him. It's probably unexpected but not entirely unwelcome.

"She'll wake up," he says, like he believes it, and Derek nods and leaves after a moment.

The clock on the wall says 8:55. Mark doesn't stick around to watch the news.

Everyone's talking about it, later. The cafeteria isn't even two-thirds full but people are talking about the news, and the girl, and Derek. It's only natural, he figures, to gossip, but it still rubs him the exact wrong way.

Still, he doesn't say a word, not even when Lexie's eyes dart over to him like she can't believe that they're talking failure already, and he knows that, after Meredith, he's the one who's supposed to defend Derek. It's one aspect of the whole friendship thing that Mark has never especially been good at.

He leaves early instead, doesn't linger, and Lexie's nods and makes short work of finding her other friends, as he goes off in search of updates on Mrs. Liddell and whoever the hell he got paged about in 412. He doesn't expect to turn a corner and have Yang all but stumble into him.

"Shepherd's patient is awake," she says, surprised and mildly excited. This is the case she actually wanted on, for the thrill of it. "They paged him but he isn't answering, so I was just going to go find him."

"He's in surgery," Mark tells her, and she starts to bolt before he's finished. He blocks her escape, holding her in place with a firm hand on her arm. "No, you're going to go check on Mrs. Liddell, and I'm going to go tell him."

Cristina goes so far as to roll her eyes before she walks off back down the way she came, her mood on a significant downturn. He can't bring himself to care. Instead he locates the nearest elevator, pressing the button that will get him to the OR Derek's in, and walking the rest of the way at a pace that's just on the edge of what one would consider a decent, professional one, instead of full out jogging in the hallway.

He wants to see the look on Derek's face when he tells him. More than that, he needs to see the look on his face.

It's instinct that allows him to remember to grab a mask in between the scrub room and the OR, but it saves him the trouble of getting yelled at for contaminating the room. Derek looks up at him, completely confused by his presence, and for some reason the first thing that finds its way out of Mark's mouth is the least important. "You forgot your pager."

"Sorry," Derek replies, the wear of the past few days evident in his eyes, the only part of his face that isn't obscured from view by his surgical mask. He tilts his head towards the nurse on his right, adding, "Sara could you ��" "

Mark cuts him off without hesitation. "She's awake."

The way Derek's eyes widen as the implications of those two words set in, the way Mark can tell he's smiling beneath that paper mask, and the way the tension in his shoulders lessens almost instantaneously sort of makes all of this media swarming, and coffee runs, and absolute lack of sleep worth it.

But that's always the way it works, when things go according to plan. It's just that they so rarely do.

"There are still more tests to do and we aren't out of the woods yet, but give it a day or two and we might just be able to call it a success."

There is the flash of a smile right as a din of voices pick up, eager with their questions and their need for clarification, just before the tape cuts out, and they turn it back over to the eleven o'clock news anchor.

"This could possibly lead to new developments in other fields, at least according to leading neurologist Dr. Michael Brenner, who had this to say ��" "

The screen snaps to black as Mark makes a grab for the remote. "Happy now?"

"Happy isn't quite the word," Derek says, his head resting on his arms, folded behind his head, flat on his back in an on-call room. Since Mark is also in this bed, minus all of his clothing, he can understand that feeling. There is relief, there is exhaustion, and there is confusion.

None of those are really all that conducive to happiness.

His phone vibrates against the floor, probably still in the pocket of his jeans, and he knows it's probably Lexie calling, wondering why he isn't home yet. For a brief moment, he almost reaches for it, almost lets his guilt get the better of him, and then draws back at the last second, aware that he can explain his way out of this with relatively little effort. No reason to give her the impression that he isn't just horribly busy with some case and therefore away from his phone.

"You should get that, you know," Derek prods, anyway.

"It can wait."

They fall silent again for a long stretch, and Mark should read it as tension over the fact that he just fucked his best friend in the on-call room after what amounts to three days on a few hours of sleep and at least double the normal amount of coffee in their system. Except that they've done this before in med school. Several times. While seeing other people. And then a few times after that. They've pretty much got it down to a science by now in fact, despite never defining or discussing it.

Derek really is the longest relationship he's ever had, just not in the same way that people would assume.

"Tell me that I'm not going to get a page in an hour telling me she coded" Derek's question is tentative, worried, concerns that he doesn't generally voice, and Mark turns his head to get a good look at the other man, finding his eyes directly on the ceiling above them.

"You did good," Mark starts, in lieu of making promises that no one can keep. Instead, he focuses on the concrete facts. "And if you don't start focusing on that, I'm going to sweet talk someone into giving you sleeping pills."

"Lexie would probably kill you," Derek starts, before he realizes the error there. She'd kill him for this too, more than likely.

"Yeah," Mark exhales, about nothing in particular, and his hand falls on Derek's arm purely by accident, but it stays there anyway. "Still be worth it," he adds, and he isn't really talking about the sleeping pills; he hopes Derek gets that. They've been them for too long now for him to not get it.

Derek finally stops his staring contest with the ceiling, shifting his

gaze onto Mark. His eyes are warm and grateful, if not a little more tired than they used to look way back in med school, and Mark forces himself to look at this as 'crisis averted' instead of reading into this thing with them, in bed once more in a way that they haven't been in years.

It's hard, you see, because while everyone's eyes are on Derek, his are fixed on Mark, and there's a part of him that wants to find the significance behind that.

There's a part of him that's slowly getting used to definitions.

He rolls over on his side, away from Derek, and reaches for his phone, listening to the thunder overhead.

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